

Typology of Forms of Painting in Nigeria

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Abstract

Painting in the 21st century artistic terrain of Nigeria is very vibrant. While scholarship on Nigerian art and painting are of relatively appreciable richness, the typology of the physical forms of painting has apparently not been of concern in scholarship. Whereas, the physical forms of painting are important in the interplay of contents and the overall significance of paintings. This study is therefore a typological analysis of forms of painting in Nigeria and was conducted with a view to determining the variations in the forms of painting. Samples for the study were 1,120 paintings, produced between 1970 and 2013 by academically trained artists, randomly collected in field work conducted between 2010 and 2013. Detailed typology was done using size and shape, media and genre. The study established that the paintings come in three shapes in order of preference and occurrence *viz*: rectangle, square and circle. For size, they come in a pecking order of occurrence of medium size, large size and small size. Media wise, oil paint is the most preferred and next to which is acrylic, mixed media, water colour, ink, gouache/poster and pastel. Four genre categories respectively of figural painting, landscape painting, still-life painting and non-objective painting were established.

Keywords: Typology, Variation, Forms, Painting, Art, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Form is generally used to describe the general appearance of an object or structure of an object. Form in relation to painting can be achieved through representation of shapes in two or three dimensional appearances. An art form is the specific shape or quality an artistic expression takes. The media used often influence the form. For example, the formal qualities of paintings are the canvas texture, colour, and brush strokes. The form of a particular painting is determined by the formal qualities of the media. In other words, form is all the things that are presented, rather than represented. For example the paint applied with brushes onto a canvas or other painting medium, the structural design with all the colours, lines and shapes and the way they are organized into a composition are considered parts of the form.

Forms in painting are consequently, in conception in this study, the structural patterns and the media of expression which an artist employs in his creation. This could also be the material qualities which in turn cumulate into the form of painting. The forms in painting can therefore be determined by the size, shape, style, media and genre. The techniques and the use of various media in painting all make an expression possible. Painting is used in this study in two senses. It is used in generic sense to refer to the artistic practice as a process and also as product of that process.

The 21st century artistic terrain in Nigeria is both rich and complex; having been built on very rich complex and outstanding artistic heritages, a good number which survived till the present and metamorphosed into or adapted into modern practices (Kalilu, 2013). In this rich and complex terrain, painting is no doubt very vibrant. Painting in Nigeria therefore provides a rich and intriguing terrain for the study of typology of forms of painting.

Forms in painting in Nigeria are not peculiar to the Country. They are similar also to those obtainable in the painting practices of a good number of cultures across the globe, especially the West. In spite of its vibrancy, scholarship on painting in Nigeria is relatively recent and relatively not as rich compared to other art forms, especially sculpture. Studies of painting of the college or academically trained artists also developed several years after scholarship on the indigenous or traditional painting had begun. The extant studies on painting have also largely concentrated on themes, biography of painters and styles among a few other scholastic concerns. For example, Adenaike (1982) examined the cultural influence of Ulli on the painting practices in the contemporary Nsukka art school. Moyo Okediji (1992) and Campbell (2008) in separate studies discussed and highlighted the peculiarities of the mural paintings in some Yoruba palaces and shrines. Chukueggu (1998) in his classification of Nigerian art made references to paintings among other art forms. Abodunrin's (2004) study in non-verbal communication was premised on colour symbolism among the Yoruba as paradigm for Nigerian painters while Olusegun and David's (2011) study focused largely on themes and the influence of the Lagos city on Nigerian landscape painters.

Typology of the physical forms of paintings in Nigeria has apparently not been of concern in scholarship. This may, perhaps, be due to the concentration of focus on themes and styles or on the erroneous belief that the physical forms of paintings may not be necessary in the study of the other aspects of painting. Whereas, the physical forms of paintings are significant in the interplay of contents and the overall significance of the paintings. The immediate foregoing makes a study of the forms of painting in Nigeria and their types imperative.

This study is a typological analysis of forms of painting in Nigeria. The study was conducted with a view to examining the variations in the forms of painting. The study is limited to an analysis of paintings by Nigerian artists and in Nigeria. There are several categories of artists in Nigeria; the academically or educational institution trained artists and the non-institution trained artists. The paintings that were studied in this work were those produced by professional painters from diverse tertiary educational institutions and geographical backgrounds in Nigeria. Furthermore, the paintings that constituted the study samples for this work were those produced by artists who have distinguished themselves through several years of practice both at home and abroad. The study covers, in temporal context, a period of forty years; precisely paintings produced between the period of 1970 and 2010. Except mural painting, all types of paintings in different media: Oil paint; water colour; gouache/poster; acrylic; pen and ink wash, pastel, and mixed media were considered. The study samples were collected from Lagos State, Nigeria in a field work that span three years between 2010 and 2013. Lagos State, is the major commercial hub of Nigeria, the State has evolved to be considered as the most urbanized and economic nerve centre in Nigeria (Odumosu, 1999: 1). Consequently, professional and commercial art activities are paramount in the State. The State in all ramifications and for artistic purposes mirrors the country in terms of artists' backgrounds and availability of their products. The state is therefore taken to be presumptuous of Nigeria. A total of 1,120 paintings were randomly collected from different artists, a sample size of 20%, making a total of 224 of the paintings were selected for this study.

Typology, the identification of a particular structure by type which may vary, is a method of scientific cognition wherein a system of objects is divided up and the objects are grouped through the use of generalized and idealized model (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1979). Problems of typology nonetheless, arise in all fields of study that deal with sets of objects of diverse content, the objects generally being discrete, and that attempt to achieve an ordered description and explanation of the sets may not be an easy task. This is particularly the case with painting as artistic practice in Nigeria and in which the physical forms of the paintings are diverse. In this study, paintings in Nigeria have been typologically grouped and classified by shape and sizes, media, and genre.

1.1 Shape and Sizes

Paintings in Nigeria are in various shapes and sizes which often significantly contributed to the effective manipulation of techniques and styles. By their shapes, the paintings are square, rectangular and circular. Size, which is significant in the presentation of any art work, was of diverse measurements that depended on the artist's choice and the subject of presentation. Such sizes could be minimal or monumental. Some subjects and functions of the paintings require specific sizes while others can be in any size; but considerations have always largely been on portability, ease of mobility and affordability to prospective collectors. Painters in Nigeria tend to work more on moderate sizes except when commissioned to do monumental sizes. Oil medium are mostly done on canvas or boards which are largely of moderate sizes. Paintings on paper are always small in size, particularly those in water colour, postal paint and ink.

We classified the paintings into three generic sizes of large, medium and small. By our classification here, averagely, the large size ranges between 115cm by 127cm and 115cm by 250cm. The medium size ranges between 60cm by 75cm and 67cm by 115cm. The small sizes range between 20cm by 25cm to 12cm by 17cm. Of the various sizes, medium size is more prevalent. Similarly, rectangle is more prevalent than the two other shapes identified. Tables 1 and 2 and charts 1 and 2 reflect the statistical details of the occurrence of these shapes and sizes.

Table 1: Analysis of painting by shape

	Shape	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Rectangle	124	55.4
2	Square	99	44.1
3	Circle	1	0.5

Chart 1: Analysis of painting by shape

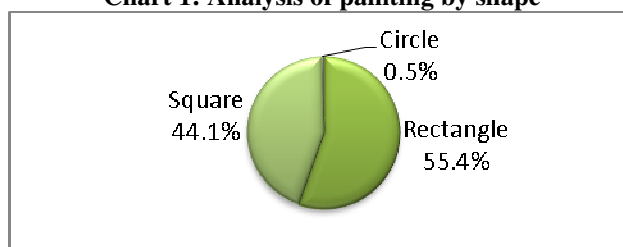
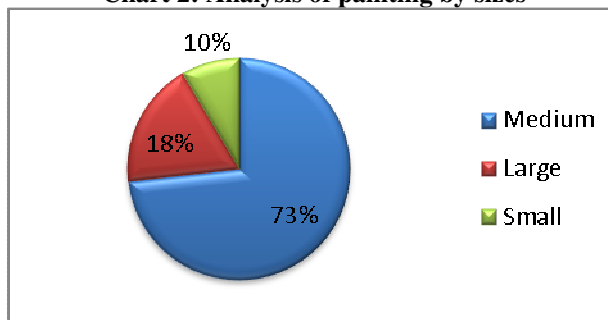


Table 2: Analysis of painting by sizes

	Size	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Medium	164	73.2
2	Large	41	18.3
3	Small	19	8.5

Chart 2: Analysis of painting by sizes



1.2 Media

The media are the vehicles or the channels used by artists to make expressions possible in painting. Generally, the painting media include oil paints, acrylic paint, water colour, gouache, ink and mixed media. Along these media lines, we have several sub-categories of painting as oil painting, water colour painting, gouache painting, poster colour painting, acrylic painting, ink wash and mixed media painting among others. 67.4% of our samples are in oil paint. This implies that in contemporary Nigeria, oil paint has become the most preferred medium of expression in painting. This medium is rendered on surfaces that include canvas, board, wall and paper among other surfaces (plates, 1 and 2).

Acrylic differs from oil paint in that it has shorter drying time and is water soluble. But can be applied directly onto canvas or board in transparent or opaque form. 13% of painters in Nigeria have developed varied patterns of expression using the acrylic paint medium with either brushes or palette knife (plates, 3 and 4).

Mixed media is a concept that was developed in the twentieth century when postmodern artists began to bend the traditional rules associated with each of the medium used together (Harrigan 2007). Mixed media is indeed an open form that allows the artist an amazing degree of freedom in terms of technique and materials (plates, 5 and 6). Mixed media paintings constituted 7.6% of the paintings.

The term 'water colour' in its own case refers to both the medium and the resulting artwork. The most common support for water colour is paper, though some artists explored other surfaces. In Nigeria, a few numbers of artists are known for the use of this medium. The occurrence of water colour is only 6.3%. This could be attributed to a peculiarity of the medium and which requires gradual building of forms from light to dark. It can also be used to achieve different styles of painting (plates 7 and 8).

Ink as a medium in painting enables artist to use both thick and thin qualities in either glossy or translucent form. It has been used overtime in the areas of drawing and mixed media painting to achieve great effects in painting. Ink constituted 4% of the painting (plates, 9 and 10). Table 3 and chart 3 show the statistical details of the occurrence of this media.

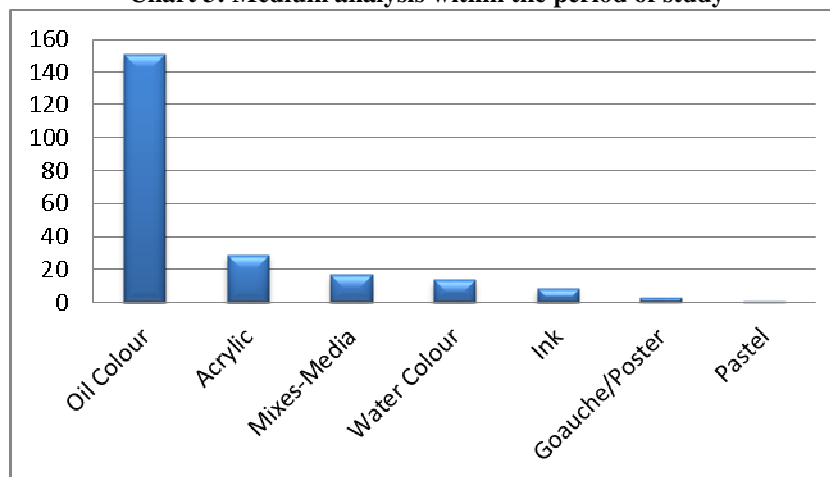
Gouache is both a medium and a method. In this study, gouache is treated as a medium. Gouache and poster paint otherwise referred to as poster colour are not exactly the same but are similar in their being water based and their opaqueness. They are therefore grouped together into one sub-category in this study. Gouache and poster are characterized by their opaqueness, relative fast speed and matt finish. However, fewer numbers of artists in Nigeria use the medium. Our analysis indicates that while paintings in water colour constituted 6.3%, those in gouache constituted 1.3% (plates, 11 and 12).

Pastel, oil or chalk, is not as widely used as other media. The reasons for this may be attributable also to the nature of the medium. Pastel, if not carefully handled rubs off the painting surface; it therefore requires fixing with removable or non-removable chemical varnish. Only 0.4% of the samples are in pastel and the list prevalent of the media.

Table 3: Analysis of painting by medium

S/N	Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Oil colour	151	67.4
2	Acrylic	29	13
3	Mixed media	17	7.6
4	Water colour	14	6.3
5	Ink	9	4
6	Gouache/Poster	3	1.3
7	Pastel	1	0.4

Chart 3: Medium analysis within the period of study



1.3 Genre

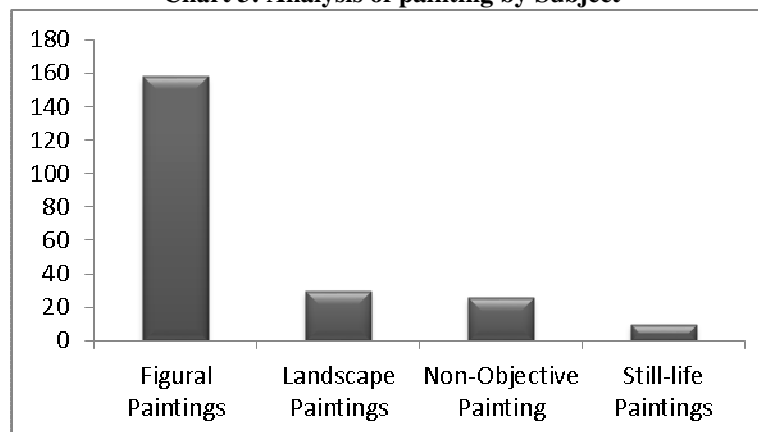
Physical attributes are not the only criteria usable for typological classification of forms. Genre is also usable. Genre in art describes the type or category of the art; in other words, a category of artistic forms. Genre in painting is diverse. There are landscape painting, seascape painting, skyscape painting, still-life painting, portraiture or portrait painting, mural painting, figural painting and non-objective paintings of several sub-categories among other genres. In Nigeria, our study samples revealed the occurrence and practice of landscape painting, still-life painting, figural composition, portraiture and non-objective. There were no seascape and skyscape paintings. Mural paintings abound but were not commonly executed by the painters and therefore not part of the samples. There were also hybridisation of the genres of cross-currents whereby elements of more than one genre is reflected in one painting. For example, landscape may be combined with figures and still-life objects combined with nature studies.

For comprehensibility, dynamism and comprehensiveness, we categorized the paintings into four genres of landscape painting, figural painting, still-life painting and non-objective painting. This taxonomy allows the different studies of the paintings to be classifiable. By our classification, figural painting includes portrait painting, and figural composition painting. The non-objective painting includes all shades of paintings in which objects are not represented. Figure painting has been greatly explored in Nigeria in various media. The genre constituted 70.5% of the samples. It is therefore the most explored genre in contemporary Nigeria. Landscape painting has also been explored to a large extent in Nigeria. The landscape paintings range from highly detailed and realistic to impressionistic, expressionistic and idealized in diverse media. 13.4% of the samples were landscape paintings. The non-objective paintings represent items or images without existential character in real or objective life. Non-objective paintings in its own case constituted 11.6% of the paintings. This makes the genre the third prevalent one. Still-life painting has also been expressed using different genres of style and media. This genre constituted 4.5% of the samples.

Table 3: Analysis of painting by Subject

	Subject	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Figural Painting	158	70.5
2	Landscape Painting	30	13.4
3	Non-objective Painting	26	11.6
4	Still-life Painting	10	4.5

Chart 3: Analysis of painting by Subject



1.4 Conclusion

Painting in Nigeria has been a vibrant enterprise. Its diversity of form makes a typological classification intriguing. This study has nonetheless classified paintings in Nigeria by shape and size, media and genre. The study has established that the paintings come in three shapes in the following order of preference and occurrence: rectangle, square and circle. Similarly, for size, they come in the following pecking order of their occurrence: medium size, large size and small size.

Media wise, oil paint is the most preferred and next to which is acrylic and mixed media in that order. The other media in the pecking order of their occurrence are: water colour, ink, gouache/poster and pastel.

Of the four genre categories, figural painting is the most prevalent, next to which are respectively landscape painting, non-objective painting and still-life. The reasons for the prevalence of rectangular shape, medium size and oil paint are not difficult to phantom. Rectangular shape allows a wide degree of freedom of expression. Moderateness of the medium size allows for portability while oil paint in its own case is certainly the most durable, malleable and easy to finish without glazing.

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Plate 1

Kolade Oshinowo *Aso Ebi*, 2010
 Oil on Canvas
 (Artist Archive 2012)



Plate 2

Joshua Nmesirionye, *Untitled*, 2009
 Oil on Canvas.
 (Artist Archive, 2013)



Plate 3

Olu Oguibe, *Lovers*, 1983
 Acrylic on Canvas
 (Artist Archive,)

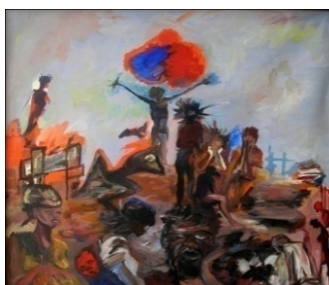


Plate 4

Jerry Buhari, *Desolation*, 2005
 Acrylic on Canvas.
 (Omenka Gallery Lagos 2000)

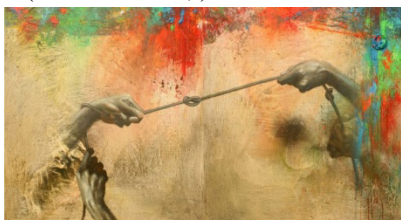


Plate 5

Kelani, Abass *Tussle*, 2010
 Mixed Media
 (Artist Archive, 2013)

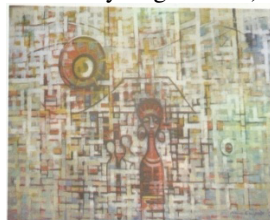


Plate 6

Akin Onipede, *Reflection*, 2002
 Mixed Media.
 (Artwithtjaj.com)

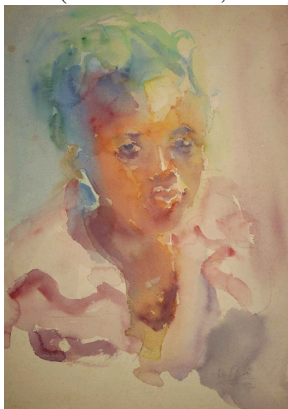


Plate 7

Pita Ohiwerei, *Girl*, 2005
 Watercolour
 (Art off the Main 2010)



Plate 8

Ibe Ananaba, *Victors or Victims series*, 2008
 Water Colour
 (Artist Archive 2011)



Plate 9
Uche Okeke, *March of the masquerade*, 1974
Ink and brush on paper
(Art Fact, 2010)

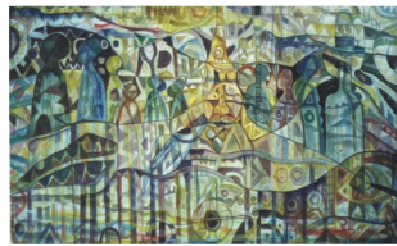


Plate 10
Kunle Filani *More Is Less*, 2000
Pen and Ink.
(Artist Archive 2010)

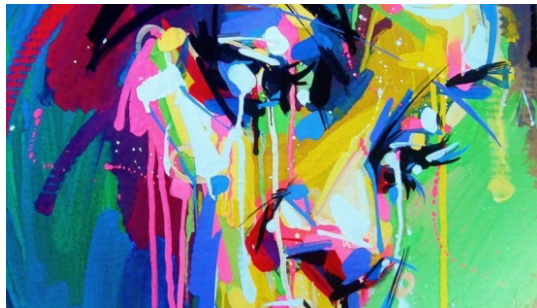


Plate 11
Ibe Ananaba *Untitled*, 2008
Gouache
(www.ibeananabaart.blogspot.com, 2011)



Plate 12
Gani, Odutokun, *The suppliant*, 1995
Postal Colour
ARTmosphere, National Gallery of Art, Nigeria, 2008: 16)

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